



Anniston Chemical Agent Disposal Facility

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Small Fire Quickly Extinguished at Anniston Chemical Agent Disposal Facility

ANNISTON, Ala., Nov. 13, 2003 – A piece of rocket debris momentarily ignited in a self-contained weapons processing room at the Army's Anniston Chemical Agent Disposal Facility (ANCDF) causing a fire alarm to sound. Fire dampers were immediately closed and within a matter of moments, the fire burned itself out. There was no release of chemical agent and there was no danger to the ANCDF work force or the public.

The alarm was received in the ANCDF control room at 2:55 p.m. today. Fire detection and protection systems immediately activated in Explosive Containment Room (ECR) B where weapons processing was taking place. The Anniston Army Depot Fire Department was called and responded to the facility at 3:10 p.m. It was at this time that ANCDF officials determined the fire was out and the fire fighters were asked to stand down.

"We are dealing with flammable material, so there are a few rare instances in which we have flare ups like this," said ANCDF Site Project Manager Tim Garrett. "Our protection systems worked exactly as they were designed. I commend the ANCDF work force and depot fire department for the way they handled the incident.

"I want to emphasize," Garrett continued, "this was not an explosion. In fact, the fire, such as it was, did not even get hot enough to cause the main fire suppression system to activate."

Garrett said the incident was handled so well that it will not impact the planned Liquid Incinerator Agent Trial Burn that will be conducted tomorrow. "There is no reason we can't move forward," he said. "The rockets are destroyed in a different furnace system and involve a separate process, so we will proceed as planned."

As of 5 p.m., the ANCDF management team began the process of evaluating what damage may have occurred in the processing room, which is anticipated to be minimal. "There's a possibility that we might have to replace a few parts on the rocket shear machine, but we don't see a lot of damage when we look at the room on closed circuit television," said Ken Ankrom, ANCDF Plant Manager.

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The ECR is a self-contained room built with 24-inch concrete and steel reinforced walls designed to contain the force of an exploding weapon. In this instance, GB (Sarin) M55 rockets were being processed in the room. After agent is drained from a rocket, the weapon is then cut into eight pieces using the rocket shear machine. After each cut is made, a spray of water and decontamination solution washes down the machine's blade to prevent the buildup of explosive and flammable material. As Garrett explained, however, there are rare times when the cutting of the rockets might cause a momentary flare up.

The ANCDF team processed 328 rockets on Wednesday. The cumulative totals are now 12,645 rockets and 13,526 gallons (122,951 pounds) of liquid GB which have been safely processed.